



Essex Energy Committee: 2020 Annual Report – COVID-19 Edition

I. Overview

The Essex Energy Committee (EEC) advocates for and supports addressing energy costs and climate change in Essex Town and Essex Junction, Vermont. EEC meetings are generally held on the second Wednesday of each month. Current members for 2021: Will Dodge (Chair), Irene Wrenner, Natalee Braun, David Skopin, and Phil March, with two vacant positions to fill. This Annual Report is submitted pursuant to Section 1(e) of the EEC Charter of 05/19/2008.

II. 2020 Achievements Based on Powers and Duties in Charter

Candidly, the pandemic made it much more difficult to achieve anything like what had been accomplished in 2018-2019, so our report is much less robust than we would have liked.

A. TRACK MUNICIPAL ENERGY USE AND RECOMMEND TO SELECTBOARD TARGETS AND ACTIONS FOR DECREASING ENERGY USE (CHARTER §1(A))

1. **Municipal Data.** With the Selectboard's permission, the Committee has been gathering information from Green Mountain Power for the Town and Village which it hopes to use constructively in 2021.

B. RESEARCH / RECOMMEND TO THE SELECTBOARD OPPORTUNITIES TO UTILIZE RENEWABLE ENERGY SOURCES AND INCREASE THE EFFICIENT USE OF ENERGY WITHIN TOWN OPERATIONS. (CHARTER §1(B))

1. **Tom Yandow.** The most important accomplishment for Essex as a whole was Tom Yandow's deployment to work on multiple projects throughout 2019-2020 to increase the efficiency of Essex's buildings, mostly with unused funds from 2020. Included among his changes were:
 - Adding insulation to the Town Fire Station
 - Retrofitting the lighting in the Village and Town Public Works Garages
 - Dehumidifying the Police Station
 - Retro-commissioning at the Town Offices, 81 Main Street
 - Addressing ongoing efficiency problems at Memorial Hall
 - Investigating the possibility of natural gas heating at the Sand Hill pool
 - Evaluating possibility of solar on rooftop of Sand Hill Park administration building as part of repair.
2. **Crescent Connector and Essex Village.** At the beginning of 2020, the Village Planner led a walking tour and met with Committee members to review the plans for the Crescent Connector and the corresponding design changes to the Village in hopes of gauging the

degree to which these plans could effect municipal energy use overall, especially for transportation and new buildings.

- C. RESEARCH AND RECOMMEND TO THE SELECTBOARD FUNDING OPTIONS FOR ENERGY EFFICIENCY AND RENEWABLE ENERGY PROJECTS. (CHARTER §1(C))
1. **Meeting with State Legislators.** EEC members met with Sen. Chris Pearson and (now) Rep.-Elect Tanya Vyhovsky to address ongoing problems with lack of funding for municipalities to address the need for progress on the climate change emergency.
 2. **Net-Metering Focus.** Further research was done into the possibility of improving access to funding through net-metering; however, more work needs to be done in 2021.
- D. DEVELOP AND MANAGE ENERGY EFFICIENCY EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS. (CHARTER §1(D))
1. **Homegrown Weatherization Efforts:** EEC Member Phil March compiled a comprehensive guide to energy efficiency incentives for Essex homeowners: <https://www.essexvt.org/DocumentCenter/View/5658/-NEW--Guide-to-Weatherization-Opportunities-for-Essex-homeowners-10-26-2020>. The Committee promoted the publication at Essex Out and About, as well as through ads in Seven Days and the Essex Reporter, and with additional publication on Front Porch Forum and through Facebook. The results are being evaluated, but it is believed that this resource can be updated to match new incentives in the future.
 2. **Communications and Awareness Raising:** The EEC maintained and expanded its [Facebook page](#) and the website, but more is planned for 2021.
 3. **VECAN Conference:** Sent two EEC members to the virtual portions of the Vermont Energy Climate Action Network (VECAN) conference to attend various workshops. (Learn more at <https://vecan.net/conferences/13th-annual-vecan-conference-2020/>).
- E. ASSIST OTHER TOWN COMMITTEES AND COMMISSIONS IN AREAS OF RELATED CONCERN, INCLUDING THE ENERGY SECTION OF THE TOWN PLAN. (CHARTER §1(F))
1. No substantive progress made on this item during 2020.

III. Plans for 2021

COVID-19 disrupted the life of Essex residents unlike anything in recent memory. Climate change – if left unchecked – promises to do the same. The urgency of addressing renewables, transportation, and weatherization for the municipality and its residents is no less than it was a year ago, but the pandemic recovery presents opportunities to strengthen resiliency infrastructure like never before. Priority goals for 2021 include (but are not limited to) the following:

- A. Continue to evaluate the municipal energy data and new account designations with DPW and utilities in order to identify new targets, and make measurable progress with energy conservation.
- B. Rethink our homegrown weatherization efforts versus involvement with the Button Up program, particularly in light of more people working from home.

- C. Develop better methods for achieving a vibrant EEC Facebook page / website, and populate the VT Community Energy Dashboard with new information.
- D. Promote Tom Yandow's accomplishments with municipal buildings.
- E. Refocus efforts with the Village on transportation items to assist with EV adoption, increasing public transportation options, and other measures to reduce congestion, including the Five Corners Crescent Connector. [Continuation of 2020]
- F. Engage with the Essex Westford School District to get more high schoolers and middle schoolers involved with energy awareness efforts and to continue the discussion about school bus electrification. [Continuation of 2020]
- G. Work with municipal and regional planning officials on implementation of the new Energy Plan, and raise broader awareness of the extreme dangers posed by climate change. [Continuation of 2020]

We thank the Selectboard, Trustees, and Town /Village officials for their continued support.

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